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### **Bryan C. Hollon, Everything is Sacred: Spiritual Exegesis in the Political Theology of Henri de Lubac**

**Citation for published version:**

Grumett, D 2010, 'Bryan C. Hollon, Everything is Sacred: Spiritual Exegesis in the Political Theology of Henri de Lubac', *Modern Theology*, vol. 26, no. 3, pp. 478-480. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2010.01623.x>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1111/j.1468-0025.2010.01623.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2010.01623.x)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Modern Theology

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*Everything is Sacred: Spiritual Exegesis in the Political Theology of Henri de Lubac* by Bryan C. Hollon (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade/Wipf and Stock, 2009) x + 214 pp.

Much of the current wave of exposition of de Lubac has focused on his *surnaturel* thesis and related issues such as the grace-nature relation. This study takes a different approach, considering his spiritual exegesis and its socio-political implications. This path to socio-political engagement via scripture is not, on the whole, the one taken by radically orthodox readings of de Lubac, despite recognitions by some key luminaries that scripture remains largely untapped by the movement and unacknowledged as a source of theological inspiration and judgment.

In the book's first part, Hollon offers a useful overview of de Lubac's political theology as developed during the 1930s, interspersed with extensive background from the later nineteenth century. Engagements with various brands of secular materialist—Comte, Feuerbach, Proudhon, Marx and Nietzsche—are analyzed alongside the Roman Catholic response in Leo XIII's *Humani Generis* and his unswerving promotion of Neo-Thomism. Hollon then considers de Lubac's ecclesiology, focusing on *Catholicism* and *Corpus Mysticum*. This is a key step in the presentation, as it shows how de Lubac regarded the Church as a product of tradition, liturgy and personal faith, all manifesting the deeper reality of Christ's action. It is this vision of ecclesial provisionality, we might add, that enabled de Lubac to challenge the collusion of a large proportion of French clergy in the Nazi occupation. For him, the Church was no triumphant inauguration of divine plenitude on earth, but in one of his metaphors a ship 'full of unruly passengers who always seem to be on the point of wrecking it'. This discussion leads into a

helpful synopsis of de Lubac's view of nature as primordially dependent on grace and for this reason evincing a natural desire for God. Scriptural exegesis can therefore only assume the form of sacred reading: not the scientific reductionism of pure nature common to both Loisy and Neo-Thomism, but a fourfold exegesis that is rightly regarded as a form of *sacra doctrina*.

The book's most significant chapters are 5 and 6, in which Hollon brings de Lubac into encounter with scriptural reasoning and radical orthodoxy. Chapter 5 outlines Frei's and Lindbeck's postliberal rehabilitation of narrative, showing how uncannily like de Lubac's spiritual exegesis this is, above all in its refusal to retreat into the conflation of the literal and historical senses. (Terminology needs to be reversed, however: for de Lubac, the historical sense is the narrative sense, as suggested by the French meaning of *une histoire* as a story, whereas the literal sense describes events actually purported to have taken place.) Hollon rightly sees de Lubac as providing much-needed resources to rekindle the scriptural imaginary via intratextual engagement, which inhabits the many social, artistic and poetic sites where scripture makes itself present and against which its innumerable interstices are illumined. In so doing, de Lubac ventures where Frei and many others dared not tread, embracing allegory rather than distrusting it. With characteristic modesty, de Lubac voiced doubts about the relevance of spiritual exegesis for today. But drawing on Rowan Williams' critique of postliberal exegesis in *On Christian Theology*, Hollon demonstrates the importance of the allegorical sensibility for precluding the possibility that scripture absorbs the world, at least in any crudely extrinsicist sense of absorption. Rather, scripture is generative and corresponds with the world in mutual relationality. This vision is undergirded by a participatory ontology, a key difference with Lindbeck.

Some theologians sympathetic to radical orthodoxy leave more space for spiritual exegesis than postliberals. Himself declaring broad sympathy with the movement, Hollon concurs that the Gospels do not define Jesus exhaustively. Acceptance of this aporia seems to endorse and even mandate spiritual exegesis, and appears to lie behind Graham Ward's call to Christians to read the signs of the times by means of deep cultural immersion. Hollon sees other areas, however, as requiring clarification or modification. First is the role of practice in theology. The theologian who feels that the 'entire ecclesial task falls on his own head' neglects the work of historical recovery that is vital to shaping practical Christian spirituality and ethics, whether in prayer, worship, food and diet, peace and war, or countless others. Second, Hollon expresses equally valid concerns about an implicitly docetic christology, or at least a monophysite incorporation of Christ's humanity into his divinity, which would effectively deny the incarnation. This could be avoided by giving better attention to the constitutive role in christology of word and sacrament, such as is present in de Lubac.

Hollon's conviction that de Lubac's theology is christologically grounded is notable. Indeed, he contends that, despite the absence of rhetoric, de Lubac in fact goes further than radical orthodoxy in 'extending a fully Christianized ontology'. This is not immediately obvious, hence the importance of the book's treatments of de Lubac's *Corpus Mysticum* ecclesiology and especially his spiritual exegesis: both are unified in Christ. De Lubac wrote in a period when, notwithstanding isolated achievements such as the *Christus* collection edited by Joseph Huby, christology was not much of a concern in French Catholic theology. This he acknowledged in his later life, stating that if he were to begin again, he would take Christ rather than the *suraturel* as his organizing motif. But as Étienne Guibert has already shown, de Lubac in fact presents a

‘dispersed’ christology that is refracted in the varied theological topics he covers. Any delineation of his christology will therefore be necessarily synthetic, and probably undertaken through the lens of other more immediate concerns, thus revealing the *surnaturel*’s christological foundation.

Until the later 1920s, Roman Catholic political theology had been occupied with defending the Church’s rights vis-à-vis the state: the relationship between the Papacy and the Kingdom of Italy, and the anticlericalism that had taken hold in France and various other European countries. As these situations gained a degree of resolution, theologians began to reflect on the Church’s emergence from cultural exile and the invigoration of its engagement with secular society, as presented in de Lubac’s inaugural lecture to the Catholic Theological Faculty of Lyons, titled ‘Apologetics and Theology’. These concerns chime well with current efforts emanating from both Rome and Orthodox centres to advance the ‘Rechristianization’ of Europe. But the other strand of de Lubac’s political theology was his resistance to Nazism. Hollon covers some of his overt political writings well (yet omitting to mention various others), but does not conduct any in-depth assessment of his writings against Nazism, which at the time exposed him to real danger. In particular, no use is made of the 18 articles amassed in *Résistance Chrétienne au Nazisme* (Cerf, 2006). Another untapped source is de Lubac’s contributions to the clandestine *Cahiers du Témoignage Chrétien*. It sometimes appears as if Hollon regards the mere fact of the Church’s existence as sufficient fulfilment of its political vocation, even though the methodology he employs surely demands specific historical acts of political witness and the narration of those acts. Moreover, it seems clear that the exhortations of de Lubac, de Montcheuil and others to the

laity to resist Nazi tyranny were one of the factors behind the revived post-war ecclesiology, which culminated in *Lumen Gentium*.

Some more attention to such literal political engagements might also have reduced the possibility of the book's title becoming a hostage to fortune. De Lubac was just as attuned to the demonic as to the sacred, as Hollon implicitly recognizes when discussing his attacks on nineteenth-century atheist humanism and twentieth-century totalitarianism. But the notion that de Lubac regarded 'everything' as sacred requires careful qualification: for him, everything is sacred only in so far as it is rooted in the divine creative act and desires God with its entire being.

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